



Office of Caribbean Programme Coordination



Caribbean Private Sector Response to Chronic Diseases (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, 8–9 May 2008)

Background Material for the Workplace Wellness Group

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide additional information on the health issues and concerns in the Caribbean; to assist in defining the role and responsibilities of the Private Sector in the elimination of chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCDs) and to assist in the development of a Workplace Wellness implementation plan that can address these concerns.

“The Health of the Region is the Wealth of the Region” is a Declaration made by the CARICOM Heads of Government at their meeting in Nassau in 2001. Here they openly acknowledged for the first time that the health of the people is an essential factor for the region’s development.

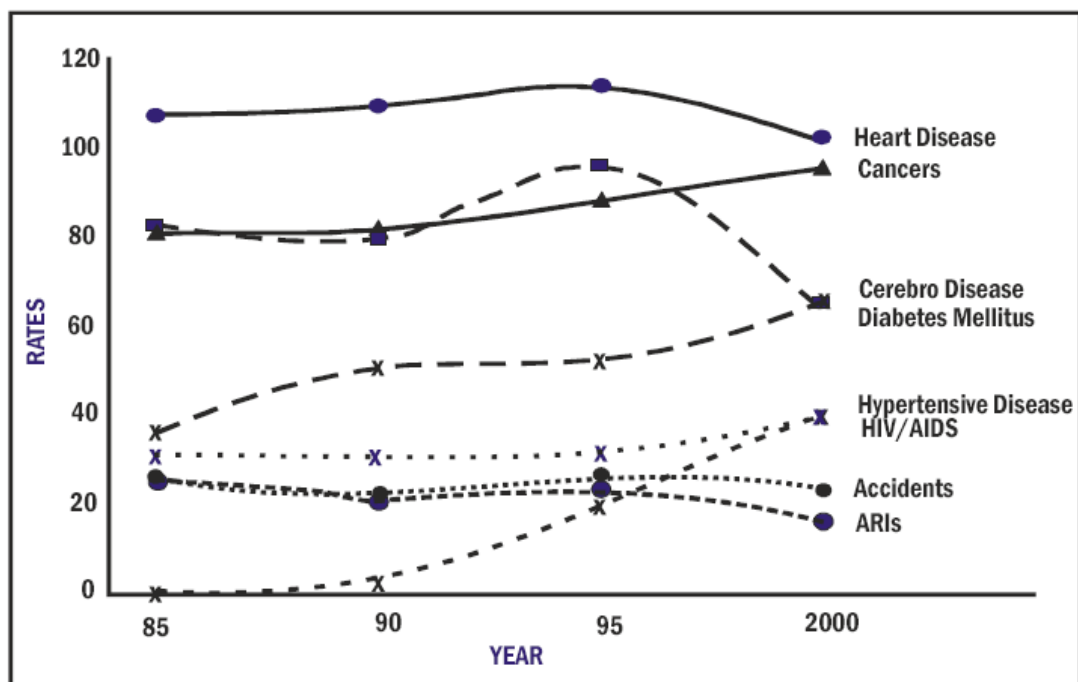
A range of socioeconomic, environmental and lifestyle or behavioral factors underlie most of the causes of preventable diseases and avoidable health costs in the Caribbean.

Caribbean Health

Chronic noncommunicable diseases are major contributors to overall mortality. The four leading causes of the death in 2000 in the Caribbean were CNCDs (heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes). These four conditions accounted for 47% of deaths in 1980 and 51% in 2000.

The major CNCDs in the Caribbean share underlying common risk factors, namely unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity, obesity, tobacco, alcohol use and inadequate utilization of preventive health services.

Crude Mortality Rates for Select Diseases by Year:
CAREC Member Countries



Age adjusted, gender specific mortality rates for heart disease, stroke and all cardiovascular diseases (CVD) for all selected countries in the 1990s for the Caribbean region are shown below:

Age-Adjusted Death Rates of Coronary Heart Disease, Stroke and Total Cardiovascular Diseases, Caribbean Countries, Selected Years in the 1990s

Country	CHD			Stroke			Total CVD		
	M	F	Both	M	F	Both	M	F	Both
Antigua and Barbuda (1995)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	329.9	218.0	270.1
Bahamas, The (1997)	65.2	44.6	53.3	69.0	65.2	66.8	241.5	202.2	218.7
Barbados (1995)	67.6	51.9	58.1	102.8	79.9	89.1	300.0	230.1	256.6
Belize (1998)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	266.6	271.8	266.4
Bermuda (1993)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	308.1	204.6	249.9
Br. Virgin Is. (1998)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	138.2	214.2	172.1
Cayman Islands (2000)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	182.6	152.6	167.3
Dominica (1989)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	223.9	171.6	197.1
Grenada (1996)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	183.5	160.3	169.6
Guyana (1996)	126.6	71.8	96.6	132.4	96.1	112.2	372.4	272.3	317.1
Jamaica (1991)	27.4	24.3	25.8	75.7	78.3	77.1	186.7	178.4	182.3
Saint Kitts (1996)	210.9	79.4	137.5	246.9	210.1	227.1	849.5	650.7	741.7
Saint Lucia (1990)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	200.9	141.4	168.1
Saint Vincent (1999)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	285.3	285.8	287.2
Trinidad and Tobago (1998)	176.7	128.7	151.5	95.3	89.0	92.1	366.3	287.6	324.8
Turks and Caicos Is. (2000)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	118.2	188.5	152.1
US Virgin Is. (1998)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	396.0	327.0	353.7

Source: CCHD Report

The reported range is from 142 for Grenada to 742 for Saint Kitts. With the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, stroke exceeds chronic heart disease (CHD) in every instance.

The impact of wealth on health has been well recognized. The wealthier societies of the world are the healthier societies of the world. Good health (both mental and physical) enhances labor productivity.

Barro's (1997) cross country analysis of 138 countries re the link between health and wealth, suggested that a five-year average in life expectancy would give a country 0.3% to 0.5 % higher annual growth in GDP.

Whatever limitations might exist in official data sources, there can be no doubt that CNCDS are the leading threats to health and well being in the Caribbean. Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) have become the leading cause of death in all countries that have adopted the 'westernized' or Euro-American lifestyle.

The table below compares Barbados and Trinidad (chosen for the English-speaking Caribbean), Cuba and Argentina (chosen for Spanish-speaking countries) and Canada and USA (chosen for North America, in order to put the Caribbean results into context).

Age-adjusted Death Rates for Selected Cardiovascular Conditions, late 1990s, Per 100,000

Cause	BAR	TRT	CUB	ARG	CAN	USA
Stroke	81.0	94.9	48.1	48.4	24.2	26.9
CHD	55.8	151.2	104.9	44.3	77.6	86.2
HHD	12.1	31.5	7.5	9.0	2.2	8.2

Source: PAHO 2002

The data from these tables make it reasonable to conclude that for the Caribbean as a whole, stroke is the number one cause of death. Historic context would suggest that over the next decade stroke will decline, while CHD will continue to rise

There is also a large economic cost to countries with poor health. See the costs associated with diabetes and hypertension for Jamaica below:

Economic Burden of Disease for Jamaica (2002)

Cost Item	Diabetes (J\$)	Hypertension (J\$)
Direct Cost		
Hospitalization	135,464,269 (8%)	84,753,708 (7%)
Clinic/Doctor's Visits	332,500,000 (21%)	415,652,000 (33%)
Drugs	113,800,284 (7%)	203,519,628 (16%)
Laboratory/Diagnostic Tests	873,487,154 (54%)	357,874,984 (29%)
Indirect Cost		
Productivity Loss	156,291,630 (10%)	186,339,706 (15%)
Total Economic Burden	1,611,543,337	1,248,140,027
Value in US\$ (1US\$=J\$48.73)	33,070,867	25,613,380

Diabetes cost Jamaica US\$ 33m (J\$1.6 billion) and hypertension cost US\$ 25.6m (J\$1.25 billion) in 2002.

The Work Environment

The working environment also plays a part in a person's well being. As company resources become less and businesses adopt leaner work practices, the workplace has become more stressful. Stress can cause headaches, backaches and neck pain and recent studies have shown that workplace stress leads to absenteeism, burnout, decreased productivity and lower morale.

A study of large employers conducted by the Medstat Group and the American Productivity and Quality Center found that health benefit programs can increase productivity and decrease company costs related to absenteeism, turnover, disability and health-care claims by 30 percent.

Summary

Based on the data that is available for the Caribbean as a whole, CVD is by far the leading cause of death.

Formal costs of illness calculations are not readily available for all Caribbean countries, but indicative exercises demonstrate the potential enormous costs of CNCDs.

Effective medical therapy for CVD in the primary care setting is feasible and could substantially reduce the CVD burden in the near term. However, primary prevention through controlling the known risk factors such as hypercholesterolemia and obesity with its co-morbidities has to be the principle approach.

Behavioral and environmental change is critical for preventing and controlling CNCDs; therefore, the Caribbean must establish systems for surveillance of the behavioral risks at the population level to support planning and evaluation of the policies that must be introduced.

Assistance from the Private Sector

Workplace Wellness

As you can see, there is a great need for a focus on wellness for the Caribbean. The solution to these issues cuts across various public sectors and the private sector as well. Every part of society has a part to play in **“the goal of which to enhance the well-being of the citizens of our countries.”**

Through corporate social responsibility (CSR), there is a growing desire for more and more organizations to behave as law-abiding ‘corporate citizens’ that have high ethical standards and morals, work towards sustainable development and are making a positive impact on:

- √ the environment,
- √ **their employees well being**
- √ **lives of others, (through education, health, human rights, employment)**
- √ serving in the community
- √ leadership development
- √ the economy
- √ local business opportunities

in a way that is aligned to it's overall company vision and mission.

Corporate policy that is mindful of good health can be consistent with the pursuit of corporate profits.

This group’s focus for the conference is to discuss and agree on ways that the Private Sector can contribute to stopping the epidemic of CNCDS in the area of **‘Workplace Wellness’** and also to develop a high level action plan to commence the implementation of our **‘Workplace Wellness’ ideas.**

What is Workplace Wellness?

Workplace wellness is an investment in your most important asset, your employees.

Workplace wellness is where a healthy workplace is created that is focused on safety at the worksite, injury prevention for employees and more recently organized programs designed to assist and support employees to choose healthier behaviors and establish healthier lifestyles. This can include increasing employee awareness through educational sessions on health topics, behavioral change programs to increase their knowledge, provide opportunities to learn new skills and / or changes to policies that support health related objectives.

Workplace wellness is seen as an effective way of reaching people, since most adults spend a large part of their day at work.

Wellness is more than physical fitness. The other dimensions to optimal health are:

- √ Spiritual health
- √ Emotional Health
- √ Social Support and
- √ Intellectual stimulation

A comprehensive workplace wellness program addresses most, if not all, of these dimensions.

As well as safety and lifestyle programs being aspects of workplace wellness, the work environment is a third factor that contributes to employees' wellness.

The Working Environment

When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more productive and tend to be healthier. When employees feel that the work environment is negative, they feel stressed. Stress has a large impact on employee mental and physical health, which impacts productivity and a company's profitability.

Consultant Graham Lowe identified five components of workplace culture that directly affect employee health and the health of the organization overall: creditably, respect, pride and camaraderie. The underlying idea is that companies must genuinely care about the well-being of their employees.

Companies today that want to attract and keep good workers need to have leaders who understand the connection between employee satisfaction and employee health and believe that workplace wellness is an investment that contributes to the business's overall strategy.

Workplace wellness benefits both the employee and the employer.

Workplace Wellness Benefits to the Employer

A workplace wellness program can help a company to:

- √ Attract and retain employees and reduce turnover
- √ Reduce recruitment fees
- √ Reduce the costs of absenteeism and lost time
- √ Reduce company insurance and health costs or keep them contained
- √ Reduce the effects of a stressful workplace
- √ Increase productivity
- √ Increased employee loyalty
- √ Increase profitability
- √ Increase morale by creating a happy, supportive environment
- √ Improve reputation in the community

Workplace Wellness Benefits to Employees

Employees of companies that have an effective workplace wellness program are likely to have:

- √ Increased awareness and knowledge of ways to improve their health
- √ A better (less stressful) workplace
- √ Increased protection from injury
- √ Improved health and well being
- √ Higher morale and greater job satisfaction
- √ Increased productivity and effective at work
- √ Reduced personal health care costs
- √ Reduced issues related to burn out
- √ A more relaxed, flexible approach to health issues

Both employers and employees have a responsibility for creating a healthy workplace. Employees are expected to arrive at work in good health, and the employers are expected to provide an environment that allows the employee to maintain good health, enjoy their work, and contribute to the company's success.

Workplace wellness is more than a 'lunch-and-learn' program. It is about developing a 'people first' approach to doing business. It is about taking care of employees, establishing a positive work environment and paying attention to the factors that keep employees healthy and happy at work. An effective workplace wellness program has an impact on an employees, spiritual, physical, emotional, social and mental well being.

Building a Workplace Wellness Program

There are many different types of wellness programs.

The wellness program that is designed depends on the overall purpose for the wellness programs, e.g. change employee behavior, reduce risk factors, reduce health care costs, etc.

All organizations from SME to large multinationals, can implement an effective workplace wellness program. Employers may utilize a wide range of wellness initiatives from wellness newsletters, creating a lunch time walking group, offering in-house massages to onsite gyms and ergonomically assessed workstations.

Every organization can have a wellness program that helps to encourage individuals to take preventive measures to avert the onset of worsening of an illness or disease and to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Best Practices When Developing a Wellness Program

You do not necessarily need a large budget, but what you do need is:

- √ Support from senior management
- √ Employee involvement
- √ A committee of a few committed people to take the lead
- √ Information on the wellness needs and interests of your employees
- √ Identified resources (money, people etc)
- √ Program objectives and goals established
- √ An implementation Plan
- √ An evaluation plan: how will you know that the program is successful

Even if you have a limited finances and /or resources you can still make a difference, by focusing on one specific topic.

Developing an Implementation Plan

1. **Vision Statement:** Create a clear vision or mission for the wellness program that explains what is going to be achieved and its purpose.
2. **Targets:** Establish the targets that will be achieved from the program (e.g. reduction in turnover, absenteeism, health claim costs, etc.).
3. **Outcomes:** Define what will be implemented in order to achieve the stated targets. E.g. lunchtime walking club held three times a week, healthy foods at all company meetings, fortnightly onsite massages, etc. These outcomes should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound).
4. **Timeline:** Assign realistic timelines to the outcomes.
5. **Budget:** Identify the finances, resources etc needed to achieve the stated vision and targets.
6. **Communication Plan:** To be successful employee engagement through communication is key. The communication plans can include the various types of medium to be used, what the key messages will be, who the various audiences will be etc. This is a critical step in the implementation process.
7. **Action Plan:** Create detailed actions of how each outcome will be achieved, including timelines.
8. **Evaluation Plan:** Establish how the program will be monitored for success and the frequency of measurement and follow-up.

Tips and Ideas for Wellness Programs

Physical Environment

- √ Create a smoke-free workplace.
- √ Provide safe and pleasant stairways that encourage employees to use them.
- √ Provide good lighting, sound, and air quality.
- √ Make available offices or meeting rooms for booking activities such as yoga, onsite massages, mediation and aerobics.
- √ Provide fridges for employees to keep snacks and meals fresh.
- √ Provide healthy snacks in vending machines and cafeterias.
- √ Provide showers and changing facilities.
- √ Install secure bike storage.
- √ Provide pedometers for employees to track their steps.
- √ Hire an ergonomic specialist to assess workstations.
- √ Provide subsidies for a local gym.
- √ Build an onsite gym.

Social Environment

- √ Implement team days to discuss ideas and build a more effective team through bonding.
- √ Provide a basket of fruit for employees.
- √ Support work life balance (mandatory vacations, allow allocated time for employees to use the internet for their personal use).
- √ Introduce flexi-time.
- √ Encourage employees to work from home.
- √ Become a partner in a community (e.g. day care, gym, etc.).
- √ Introduce fitness or health competitions.
- √ Conduct employee satisfaction survey and implement recommendations.
- √ Invest in leadership development and coaching.
- √ Provide Employee Assistance Programs.

Health Practices

- √ Distribute a 'wellness' newsletter or 'health tip' of the week.
- √ Hold 'lunch and learn' sessions on healthy habits.
- √ Introduce on site seated chair massages as stress relievers for employees.
- √ Provide health related rewards and recognitions awards.

- √ Hire a fitness or yoga instructor.
- √ Provide Healthy snacks served at meetings and conferences.
- √ Hold stop smoking clinics.
- √ Provide weight loss and weight management clinics.
- √ Provide health risk appraisals and fitness assessments.
- √ Provide a wellness subsidy for health and leadership activities and courses.
- √ Offer financial incentives to be healthy.

A workplace wellness program does not have to be complicated or need huge expenditure.

Ensure that you get support from senior management, bring a few committed people together to generate some ideas and then get started.

Wellness Programs Are Worth Every Dollar You Spend

By [Miriam Sims](#), published in the *St. Louis Business Journal*

Health-care costs aren't the only reason to have wellness programs. However, many companies dropped wellness programs in recent years as they turn to managed care health insurance plans.

This is short-sighted because managing health-care costs is one of four reasons wellness programs make economic sense. In addition to reducing demand for medical services, wellness programs provide economic benefit by reducing absenteeism, reducing on-the-job injuries and workers' compensation costs, and reducing disability-management costs.

Studies show employee absenteeism is reduced when wellness programs are implemented. In a study at Prudential Insurance, disability days were 20 percent lower and disability-per-capita costs were 32 percent lower after implementing a wellness program. In addition, annual medical costs fell by 46 percent.

According to a study of a wellness program at Providence General Medical Center, per-capita workers' comp costs were reduced 83 percent and other savings were realized in reduced sick leave and health-care costs, thanks to implementation of a wellness program.

These studies document tangible economic benefit from wellness programs. Intangible benefits may be even more important to an organization's overall health: Increased productivity is one of the most important benefits of operating a business with fit, healthy employees.

Wellness programs also help to recruit and retain the most effective, productive employees. Studies show a correlation between employees who seek out corporate wellness programs and the most productive workers. Morale is another benefit of a wellness program. These programs are inexpensive ways to show employees the organization is interested in them as total persons.

At a time of reduced job security, wellness programs provide a spark of good will and foster the all-important message of self-responsibility.

Businesses contract with managed care firms to control health-care costs. The employer, however, takes a passive role by shifting the risk of controlling costs to the HMO or insurance company. In the long run, costs will be shifted back to consumers and the employer through increasing premiums and costs, or decreased services.

In recent years, competition is responsible mainly for keeping health-care inflation under control but resulting shakeouts and mergers will cause prices for medical services to rise again.

Corporations that once jettisoned wellness programs may find their employee base is less healthy.

This column first appeared in the Denver Business Journal. Miriam Sims is a consultant with Denver-based Health Promotion Management Inc.

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References

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